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ABSTRACT

This document evaluates a pilot project in Wake County (North Carolina) to improve the achievement of at-risk black male students in grades 6-8 by linking them with supportive black adult-male role models from both the school and the community. The project is designed to overcome the following developmental barriers: (1) lack of a male role model; (2) confused relationships with females; (3) low school involvement; and (4) poor skills development. Students are targeted on the basis of declining achievement test scores, but they must demonstrate potential for academic success and the personal strength to resist negative influences. Each student is matched with a "personal model," a black male educator who develops a plan to improve the student's school work in cooperation with the student's parents and teachers, and a "community model," an employed black male who focuses on developing peer relationships, success at school, and leadership. The following evaluation results are reported: (1) 88 percent of the participants maintained enrollment and regular attendance in the program; (2) 87 percent of the participants maintained or improved their conduct; (3) 88 percent of the participants identified and met one or more behavior and/or performance goals weekly; (4) 95 percent of the participants improved their school attendance; and (5) 65 percent of the participants maintained or improved their academic performance. Brief profiles of five participants and a participant identification form are appended. (FMW)

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Wake County
Public School System

School/Community Helping Hands Project:

A Plan to Combat Negative Influences On Black Male Youth

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SCHOOL/COMMUNITY HELPING HANDS PROJECT/1988-89
ABSTRACT

In 1987-88 the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and other private donors made possible a serious inquiry about how a negative network of factors which inhibit the development of young black male students could be changed. Using this private financial support, Wake County Public School System launched an innovative program, the School/Community Helping Hands Project. The partnership between the school, the home, and the community is shaping a successful program which has the potential for becoming a viable nationwide model of intervention for the at risk black male student.

Just one short year of the three-year program has yielded positive results. The major program objectives contain strategies that were developed by the Personal Models and the Superintendent to implement the concept of the model. The positive impact of the strategies has been recorded in both an anecdotal manner and in an analysis of objective data.

The impact of Phase One is highlighted in the following items:

88% of the Student Partners maintained enrollment and regular attendance in the program as evidenced by attendance records kept in monthly log;

87% of the Student Partners maintained or improved conduct grades from his classroom teachers, indicating growth of a positive perception;

88% of the Student Partners identified and met one or more behavior goals and/or performance goals weekly as evidenced by the Individualized School-work Plans maintained by Personal Models;

95% of the Student Partners attained school attendance rates of 90% or better on average daily attendance;

65% of the Student Partners maintained or improved letter grades of performance in the classroom;

The first year of the School/Community Helping Hands Project has contributed significantly to the understanding of how strongly the network of negative factors effects black male students. The question of whether we can put in place a developmental intervention model that changes some student outcomes has been answered with a resounding yes. We are continuing the search for effective strategies to enhance school success and academic performance.

After analyzing the Phase One data, a revision in the model is planned. Phase Two will now include the continuation of Personal Models with seventh grade students and the establishment of strong linkages with the Community Models. Phase One will begin as planned with the second group of sixth grade students in 1988-89.

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SCHOOL/COMMUNITY HELPING HANDS PROJECT

Wake County Public School System
Initiated in the Fall of 1987

"A pilot effort to test the effectiveness of a model designed to increase the tendency in black male students to more fully access educational opportunities and to combat negative influences on their development."

FOCUS OF THE PERSONAL MODEL

The black male child reaches a critical stage in identity formation and looks in the environmental mirror for an answer to the question "Who am I?" The response frequently tends to instill a low self-concept and the acceptance of a nonproductive standard of existence. The primary purpose of this pilot project is to alter the reflection from the mirror with positive and "touchable" models. Each model will spend a minimum of 20 contact hours per month with their assigned student partners. All formal project activities will be conducted during nonschool time. Open communication will be maintained with appropriate family members and school officials. Activity records will be kept by the models.

Project models will focus attention and activities in four primary areas:

Positive Role Modeling
Improving School Success
Understanding and Improving Peer Relations
Developing Leadership Potential

Much of what occurs between models and students should be spontaneous and born of a trusting and productive relationship between the two individuals. However, models will be expected to keep the project on course and focused on the primary objectives. The suggested strategies outlined below should stimulate thought in each of the primary areas.

I. Positive Role Modeling

Focus

A black male model is a positive factor in the wholesome development of the black male child. Such models must be close enough to the child for meaningful interaction to occur. The strongest benefits of this project will no doubt result from the intangibles of the child's association with a sturdy, successful and caring individual.

Strategies

Establish rapport with the youngster through honesty and genuine dialogue. Avoid "lecturing" and being "judgmental" in the early stages of the relationship. Inquire as to his feelings about such things as growing

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up, becoming independent, and caring about others. Recognize that he may not have good answers. Share your feelings.

Share information about your profession or career field. Stress the satisfaction of a "man's work."

Find ways to spend some "quiet time." Allow for spontaneous dialogue initiated by the youngster.

Reflect a personal commitment to values and modes of behavior that give rise to a strong sense of personal worth and self-realization.

Listen. Effective listening involves patience and a show of feelings. Active listening also involves giving feedback.

II. Improving School Success

Focus

The model should focus on self-perception on the part of the student partner seeking to force an honest situational analysis of the school experience. What are the obstacles to greater success? Does the student respect the value of a good education? More often than not, the black male student exhibits a failure or "low grade" profile. Without intervention, he has the tendency to accept and own this image resulting in low expectations and an unhealthy self-concept.

Strategies

Develop information sharing contacts with both home and school so as to facilitate consistency and a unified encouragement pattern.

Develop an individualized school work plan to serve as an agreement between model and student. Take input from both home and school.

Inquire regularly about progress in school and in school-related activities. Arrange to review assessment data, progress reports, homework, etc.

Assess the student partner's feelings about teachers and school in general. Seek to develop a positive attitude and behavior pattern.

Provide examples of good study habits and seek to instill an appreciation for doing excellent work in school and at home in preparation for school.

III. Understanding and Improving Peer Relations

FOCUS

To a great extent, a young person's interactions with his peers help shape some of his most important attitudes and behaviors. These attitudes form the basis for how he will view himself, others, and society in general as he approaches adulthood. In many black homes, particularly those headed by one parent, youths learn as much or more from peers as is derived from influences at home.

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STRATEGIES

Inquire about present peer group structure, both in the school and in the community.

Emphasize peer relations as a social support system.

Point out positives and negatives in peer relations. Discuss how those relations can result in inspiration and motivation as well as disappointment and frustration.

Help the youth participant examine ways he can consciously "choose" peers.

Emphasize the need to maintain a healthy balance between peer attitudes/behaviors and his individuality.

IV. Developing Leadership Potential

FOCUS

A solid feeling of self-worth is critical to the development of leadership potential. Relationships between personal models and student participants should encourage attention to peer relationships, communication skills, and opportunities to stand before groups and facilitate group activities.

STRATEGIES

Foster discussions of the importance of an individual's impact on peers and associates.

Teach the basic principles of parliamentary procedure from Roberts Rules of Order.

Conduct group activities involving all assigned student participants which are designed to offer leadership experiences to individual students.

Profile local leaders and arrange interaction opportunities.

Videotape "stand-up" experiences and review within the group.

Stress honesty and genuineness.

Establish activities to build vocabulary and strengthen expression.

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MODELING

Focus:

A black male model is critical to the wholesome development of the black male child. Such models must be close enough to the child for meaningful interaction to occur. In this area, the benefits of the program will come from the intangibles of the child's association with a sturdy, successful and caring individual.

Strategies:

- Establish rapport with the youngster through honesty and genuine dialogue...inquire as to his feelings about such things as life, growing up and becoming independent and caring about people. Share your feelings. Recognize that he may not have good answers. Let him know that that's okay.

- Try to get him interested in your profession or career field. Get around to stressing the satisfactions of a "man's work."

- Find ways to spend some "quiet time." Allow for spontaneous dialogue to be initiated by the youngster.

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Self-Concept

Focus:

By the time a child reaches school age his self-concept is quite well formed and his reaction to learning, to school failure and success, and to the physical, social, and emotional climate of the classroom will be determined by the beliefs and attitudes he has about himself.

Strategies:

- Creating an Open Caring Environment
  - Mutual support and caring (affection)
  - Encouragement
  - Shared decision-making
- Symbols of Success
  - Self-portrait
  - Body language
  - Communication
- Acceptance of Oneself
  - I am somebody
  - I am capable
  - Goal-setting
- Enhancing Self-Concept (see attached)
  - Public interview (student to student)
  - Who Are We?
  - Nicknames
  - Personal Evaluation Sheets
  - IALAC
  - The Car
  - Friends
  - Family Tree
  - Friendly
  - Five Years Ahead: Resume

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NETWORK OF NEGATIVE FACTORS

When the black male child reaches that critical stage in identity formation and looks in the environmental mirror for an answer to the question "Who am I?" the response frequently tends to instill a low self-concept and the acceptance of a non-productive standard of existence. There would appear to be cause to suspect that a network of negative factors is at work against this child as he struggles to become an adult. The following components of this network seem obvious to this writer:

- The absence of a sturdy and contributing male parent in a major percentage of black families denies the black male child a readily accessible model to positively influence his development.
- The black male child experiences perplexing and frequently transitioning relationships with females that challenge identity formation and influence development from a number of angles.
- The black male child seems more directly at risk developmentally in the school setting than his counterparts. The public school setting presents at least three challenges most likely to attack him in his most vulnerable areas.
- Sequential and continuous skills development is seriously hampered for the black male child as he struggles with previously identified dynamics of development.

We live in a male dominated society. While the pursuit of equal opportunities for women and the civil rights movement in general have brought attention to gross inequities in our way of life, the character out front has not changed. Given this near-reversed posture of the sexes, the black race is drifting even more out of sync with the majority culture as our male character struggles to establish and sustain himself.

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EDUCATION COMPONENT

Focus:

Low self-esteem frequently results in low grades, subject failures, retentions, suspensions and dropouts. A person usually performs at the level he thinks he should perform. Seldom does a person perform at a higher level than he thinks he is capable of performing. Many of our black male students have a poor self-image as a result of failure or low grades over a period of years. They have failed so many times and in so many different ways that they have accepted failure as a way of life. How these students think about themselves and how they view school must be changed if they are to be successful. Consequently, the mentor must focus on self-esteem and the mentee's respect for education.

Strategies:

- Develop a bond with the mentee that will provide a close relationship with an adult to fill a void that might exist at home.
  - Be a good listener
  - Offer advice based on experience
- Inquire about progress in school and school related activities.
  - Examine assessment data sent home.
    - Report card
    - Interim report
    - Test data (CAT, Basic Skills)
  - Assess feelings about teachers and school generally.
  - Provide some tutorial assistance if possible.
    - Homework
    - Major test
    - Problem areas
  - Peer relations (positive or negative).
- Establish a relationship with school personnel to stay aware of mentee's progress and attendance.
  - Personal conferences
  - Phone conferences
  - Written communication
- Follow-up with parent.

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School/Community Helping Hands Project
Student Identification Profile

The target group for the initial effort of this program will be black male sixth grade students who, although they have deficiencies and are "at-risk" of failure, also have strengths which can be tapped for a success building process. The targeted students will have, but not limited to, the following characteristics:

- Black male Wake County Public School student.
- Presently in grade 6.
- Not older than 12 years of age.
- Below fortieth percentile in reading and/or math.
- Has demonstrated potential for school improvement and success. (Evidenced by early school performance, teacher recommendation, etc.)
- Displays lack of personal strength or low self-esteem.
- Not identified as handicapped.
- May display some inappropriate behavior, but would not be classified as hard-core.
- Needs additional academic support.
- Frequently non-verbal or non-interactive.
- Tardiness and/or absenteeism may be a problem.
- May be unmotivated.
- Marginal student.
- Home situation may be a negative factor.

Attached is a Student Identification Profile application form. Please complete an application for each student (up to ten) that you recommend. Completed applications should be sent to Bill McNeal, 3600 Wake Forest Rd.

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Profiles of Program Participants

The following individual profiles reflect examples of the characteristics of students accepted into the Helping Hands program:

- *Moderate problems:* Attending to specific tasks, working without supervision, complying with school rules, tolerating frustration, and controlling impulses.

  Family background: Father is deceased, but mother has regularly attended parent conferences and can be easily contacted.

  CAT scores: Scores dropped in three years from the 97th percentile to the sixth percentile in math and from the 93rd percentile to the 11th percentile in reading.

  Teacher comment: Student has a lot to offer and more potential than now exhibiting. He could use an extra boost.

- *Moderate to severe problems:* Attending to tasks, organizing himself and materials, completing class and home assignments, complying with school rules, coping with new situations, tolerating frustration, and controlling impulses.

  Family background: Lives with his grandmother, but does have some contact with his father. Mother is deceased. Difficulty experienced by school in communicating with his family (no telephone).

  CAT scores: Scores dropped in one year from the 99th percentile in math to the 79th percentile and from the 51st percentile in reading to the 30th percentile.

  Teacher comment: Felt he was capable if he could be guided in the right direction; also expressed the need for an additional male figure since the child does not live with his father.

- *Moderate to severe problems:* Attending to tasks, working without supervision, organizing himself and materials, completing class and home assignments, coping with new situations, tolerating frustration, and controlling impulses.

  Family background: Parents have provided support to the school when notified about misbehavior.

  CAT scores: Scores dropped in two years from the 91st percentile to the 44th percentile in math and from the 92nd percentile to the eighth percentile in reading.

  Teacher comment: Indicated he has athletic potential and would benefit from direct, consistent guidance in homework and test preparation.

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Profiles of Program Participants

The following profiles reflect the type of student accepted into the Helping Hands Program:

- Student exhibited moderate problems with attending to specific tasks, working without supervision, complying with school rules, tolerating frustration, and controlling impulses. His father is deceased, but his mother has regularly attended parent conferences and can be easily contacted. His CAT scores dropped in three years from the 97th percentile to the sixth percentile in math and from the 93rd percentile to the 11th percentile in reading. His school indicated that he had a lot to offer and more potential than he was exhibiting. He could use an extra boost.

- Student showed moderate to severe problems with attending to tasks, organizing himself and materials, completing class and home assignments, complying with school rules, coping with new situations, tolerating frustration, and controlling impulses. Student lives with his grandmother, but does have some contact with his father. His mother is deceased. Difficulty experienced by school in communicating with his family (no telephone). His CAT scores had dropped in one year from the 99th percentile in math to the 79th percentile and from the 51st percentile in reading to the 30th percentile. The school felt he was capable if he could be guided in the right direction. The school also expressed the need for an additional male figure since the child does not live with his father.

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School/Community Helping Hands Project
Student Identification Profile Application

Student's Full Name _____ Current School _____

Parent(s) Name _____ Next Year's School Assignment _____

Address _____

_____

Home Phone _____ Emergency Phone _____

Student ID Number _____ Current School Year _____

Grade _____ Date of Birth _____

Behavior (Check the appropriate column)

	Severe Problems	Moderate Problems	Average	Above Average
Attends to task	( )	( )	( )	( )
Works on tasks without supervision	( )	( )	( )	( )
Organizes self and materials	( )	( )	( )	( )
Completes class and home assignments	( )	( )	( )	( )
Complies with school rules	( )	( )	( )	( )
Copes with new situations	( )	( )	( )	( )
Maintains satisfactory peer relationships	( )	( )	( )	( )
Displays need for reassurance	( )	( )	( )	( )
Tolerates frustration	( )	( )	( )	( )
Controls impulses	( )	( )	( )	( )

Most recent Achievement Test Data (CAT):

Total Math: Date _____ Percentile _____

Total Reading: Date _____ Percentile _____

Highest CAT Score on Record for this Student

Total Math: Date _____ Percentile _____

Total Reading: Date _____ Percentile _____

Briefly outline evidence of parent involvement in this student's education:

_____

_____

_____

Why did you recommend this student for the program?

_____

_____

_____

Please attach a copy of the student's recent report card.

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Revised 6/1/88